
Company Training Calendar

Tips and Strategies

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As soon as a new company commander takes command, he faces the task of developing a training calendar that will ensure his squads' ability to maintain a high level of proficiency in numerous combat tasks.

Here are a few things you either must do or should do, and some techniques you may want to consider before you take command:

Read and understand FMs 25-100, *Training the Force*, and 25-101, *Battle-Focused Training*. FM 25-100 will help you understand how to sustain unit proficiency and will provide information on multi-echelon training techniques, mission essential task list (METL) development, calendar planning, and, most important, assessment and evaluation. FM 25-101 will cover much of the same information but will give you a detailed outline showing how your training products should look.

Talk with the battalion's key per-

sonnel. I suggest that you have several in-depth conversations with the battalion commander, the S-3, the command sergeant major, and (if assigned to a mechanized unit) the executive officer. These talks should give you the answers to several questions: What is the commander's training philosophy and focus? What will he expect of you and your company during each training cycle? What special missions, if any, will your company be expected to execute in the event of war? A special mission might be *conduct screen, conduct or assist a passage of lines*, or *assume the mission of the battalion scouts*. Once you get a clear understanding of your role, visit the S-3 to find out what training strategy he has designed for the battalion.

The S-3 can also provide information that will help you develop or refine your company METL. He can give you data on training cycle trends, such as when

selected division, brigade, and battalion mandatory training events will take place. These events are usually personnel intensive and will consume a large number of your soldiers and their training time. The S-3 should always be your first stop to solve difficult training or planning issues. Do not overlook his experience and knowledge by going directly to the commander for training related answers. You will discover that the commander is normally far too busy with his other tasks.

The command sergeant major will be a great help to you throughout your command. He will be able to provide you with information on the strengths and weaknesses of the primary training force within your company—the non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Ask for his goals, strategies, and priorities for sergeants' time, expert infantryman badge, common task training, or any other NCO-related training events.

Strive to develop an open and honest relationship with him. Don't be afraid to take his advice, and don't be concerned that he will be offended if you decide not to take it. The CSM will understand what you're trying to accomplish as a company commander and will do all he can to help you succeed.

Finally, if you're in a mechanized unit, a talk with the XO will give you a better understanding of the commander's maintenance goals, philosophies, and strategies. The XO can also provide information on specific maintenance trends, strengths, and weaknesses within your company and your assigned maintenance team.

Review the METLs and mission statements two levels up. Know what your higher headquarters will want to accomplish during a war. Look closely at the brigade and battalion METLs and mission statements. These are the road maps that show whether you will be attacking, defending, and counterattacking, or in the reserve. Compare them with your company METL. If the battle-focused tasks on the battalion METL are mostly offensive in nature and your company METL includes an abundance of defensive tasks, it may be time to make some changes. Keep this process simple so you can meet the intent of the commander's mission statement. Also, add only those tasks that will help your squads achieve any special mission they will be expected to execute during combat. You may also compare your company mission statement and METL with those of the other companies. There should be very few differences, other than one or two special missions the commander may assign each company.

By the time you take command, you understand your mission, you've developed your company METL, and it meets the intent two levels up. Now it's time to put together your first training calendar. This is what you have to do:

Review the most recent quarterly training brief (QTB) information. Remember that the commander before you may have briefed the brigade commander on the training focus and gained approval for the upcoming quarter. A radical change at this point could do

more harm than good and may cause your company to miss valuable training time. But if you're at the end of the training quarter and will be briefing the new strategy, I recommend the following:

Spend some time with your first sergeant, and figure out your goals for the new training quarter. An example of this may be *train to a "T" level six squads on battle drills, breach a wire-mined obstacle, enter a trench line, and destroy a trench/bunker complex*. On the basis of these tasks, devise a training strategy that will make sure the related individual, collective, and leader tasks are achieved to standard. This training should culminate in a company internal or external evaluation to provide feedback and an assessment of your efforts.

Review the division's training events calendar, and pull out all of the major training events that will affect your company—ARTEPs, simulation exercises, gunnery exercises, officer professional development (OPD) sessions, terrain walks, and holidays. Confirm these events with the battalion S-3, and place them on your calendar.

Review the mandatory AR 350-1, brigade and battalion training events or calendars—the battalion quarterly training guidance, seasonal training, driver's training, safety training, alert exercises, platoon or squad training events, unit-conduct-of-fire training, red cycles, small arms qualification (range weeks), services, tactical exercises without troops (TEWTs) or professional development sessions, and training holidays. Again, confirm the dates and events with the battalion S-3 and place them on your calendar. Don't forget to add Federal and company training holidays.

Now that you've placed the external events on your calendar, look closely at the number of training days you actually have to reach your desired end state. This will be your last chance to adjust your initial plan, so don't be afraid to make changes. Too often company commanders try to do too much and end up accomplishing very little. Once you make adjustments, or decide to stay with your original con-

cept, determine how to reach proficiency in each of the training disciplines (individual, collective, and leader tasks).

Here are a few tips that will help you make the most of your training time, land, and other resources.

Individual training: Don't let red cycles destroy you. This is the time when you and your first sergeant must come together and, if I may use a horrible term to describe it, *micro-manage* time and soldiers. This may mean daily meetings with the platoon sergeants to learn who will be available the next day once they have met detail commitments. You may find there are only ten or 15 soldiers who are not committed. Pull them together under the senior person and assign them several individual tasks that are related to your training strategy. At the end of the day, have one of your platoon leaders or platoon sergeants conduct an internal evaluation of their efforts and give you the feedback. If this process is kept simple, you will accomplish many of your individual tasks during each of the red cycles throughout the quarter. Maintain good records, and give common task training credit to those soldiers who meet the standards.

Collective training. Many will disagree with me on this tip, but you can maximize your training efforts by using sergeants' time whenever possible. If you plan, resource, and execute aggressive training, your squads will be protected from the numerous training distractions. Sergeants' time will be your only true training time, and you and your first sergeant must ensure that the training remains focused on meeting your overall training goals and strategies. Try to keep the battle drills being trained to one or two, and at the end of the day you will have time to conduct internal evaluations. Train all day and away from the company/battalion area. All too often, training will start at 0730 and end with the 1130 meal at the dining facility. I suggest, instead, an 0530 road march that ends in one of the local training areas, a lunch of MREs (meals, ready to eat), and a 1500-1700 road march back to the company area. If your strategy includes night training, this is the day to stay out late. Have

your company XO plan for a hot meal and conduct a night tactical field feeding.

Leader training. Take advantage of brigade/battalion terrain walks, OPDs, and TEWTs. Plan to keep your senior leaders on the ground, and conduct your own leader training that relates to your training strategy. By piggy-backing on the higher units, you will save yourself some training days. OMEGA training and OPDs with your platoon leaders and platoon sergeants during the first hours of sergeants' time will help keep your leadership training focused on the tasks required to achieve your strategy.

Once you've developed your training

strategies and overlapped all of the external and internal events on your training calendar, it is time to match your plan to the available training days. Here is a technique that may help. Focus your level of training within each month of the quarter: first individual, then collective/leader tasks, and finally internal and external evaluations. At the QTB, the brigade commander will approve the battalion's training plan, and you will be on your way to re-sourcing and training.

These are only a few tips to help resolve the recurring issues, conflicts, and distractions associated with maintaining proficiency in today's unstable and re-

source-constrained training environment. You are responsible for the training of your company. If you can't find a method that works, your soldiers will suffer in peacetime and die in combat. Company command will be the most challenging and the best time of your career. Do all you can to make it count.

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